

Sinclair Broadcasting's decision to force their stations to air an anti-Kerry documentary days before the election is a clear example of the dangers of media consolidation. Moreover, it's an example of the power of a large media owner to push political propaganda while calling it "news" when it's nothing of the sort. In doing so, it not only exhibits a complete lack of news judgment and insults the public's intelligence, it shows extraordinary bias and damages the reputation and credibility not only of its own stations' news departments but also the credibility of all journalists and broadcast news stations.

As a journalist who is severely concerned about station owners who have poor news values and news departments that show bad judgment, I particularly resent that Sinclair feels no compulsion to identify this so-called "documentary" as one, long editorial and free advertisement for the Bush campaign. At the very least, the company should be forced to do so. Anything less is outrageous.

In addition, if Sinclair wants to give free time for political editorials favoring one candidate, it should be forced to give equal time to that candidate's competitor(s). That's the least Sinclair owes us, given that Sinclair uses the public airwaves free of charge and is obligated by law to serve the public interest. But when large companies control the airwaves, they can severely curtail the marketplace of ideas by unfairly, unduly limiting the views expressed and discussed on those airwaves. We need more voices on those public airwaves, not fewer -- and more takes on the news, not some homogenized version produced from a central location and pushed onto local stations -- let alone propaganda pieces like this mockumentary that stations in this corporate network can be forced to run. In doing this, Sinclair will be exerting undue influence on the markets in which it operates and exhibiting egregious bias. This is of extraordinary concern in any election year, let alone one so contentious as this.

Sinclair's actions show why we need to strengthen media ownership rules, not weaken them, and why large media consolidations should be blocked. In all likelihood, Sinclair -- not unlike Fox -- should be forced to sell some of its holdings in markets in which it owns other media and should NOT be allowed to own more than 15 percent of total stations in the U.S. broadcast markets. Sinclair's behavior also shows why the license renewal process needs to involve far more than merely a returned postcard. Wise up already!!

Thank you.